

Department of Transitional Assistance

COVID-19 HIP Notice of Opportunity

COMMBUYS BID NUMBER: BID-20-112-WEL60-60000-52360

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Responses Due: July 1, 2020

COVID-19 Notice of Opportunity to Serve as a Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) Vendor and Increase HIP Access Points

OVERVIEW

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) is the state agency responsible for administering the Commonwealth's transitional assistance programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP provides nutrition benefits to supplement the food budget of needy families so they can buy healthy foods.

As part of the SNAP program, DTA operates the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), which incentivizes clients to buy more fruits and vegetables. The HIP benefit credits clients' SNAP accounts with a matching incentive for each dollar spent at participating HIP vendors on eligible fruits and vegetables, up to a monthly limit.

Participating HIP vendors include SNAP-authorized farms, farmers' markets, mobile farmers' markets, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Pilot programs. CSA Pilot programs may be operated by direct marketing farms, farmers' markets, or nonprofit buying cooperatives.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DTA is seeking to add more access points where clients can maximize their SNAP dollars by earning the HIP incentive for their purchase of healthy fruits and vegetables. Accordingly, DTA is accepting proposals from eligible local produce vendors who seek to establish new access points or CSA programs to process HIP. This opportunity is open to both new and existing HIP vendors.

New and existing vendors who are selected and add new HIP access points will not be compensated through this opportunity. However, so long as HIP funding is available, vendors may experience increased sales, as DTA clients choose to shop at their locations in order to utilize their HIP benefit.

Selection to participate in this HIP expansion will be based on the vendor's ability to distribute healthy produce to vulnerable communities and populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the purposes of this expansion, vulnerable communities are defined as those living in areas

highly impacted by COVID-19, areas designated as food deserts, and areas with relatively few HIP access points relative to their SNAP client populations. Vulnerable populations are defined as those for whom food insecurity has been disproportionately exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, including but not limited to seniors, people with disabilities, people confined to their residences because of illness or chronic medical issues, people of color, and people whose primary language is not English.

DTA is specifically seeking vendors who will sell via innovative models that reach clients where they live and thus reduce in-person contact to limit the transmission of COVID-19. Examples of distribution methods preferred during the COVID-19 pandemic include delivery, curbside pickup, mobile markets and/or CSA models.

This opportunity is being made available at this time because additional HIP incentive funding was allocated to DTA in May of 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. HIP funding is subject to appropriation. DTA cannot ensure that the same level of funding will be available in the future for HIP incentives.

ELIGIBLE ENTITIES

New vendors applying to become HIP-authorized retailers must be SNAP-authorized farm retailers with one of the following [USDA Food and Nutrition Service \(FNS\) classifications](#):

- Direct-marketing farms
- Farmers' markets
- Delivery routes (mobile farmers' markets)
- Nonprofit buying cooperatives
- Fruit/vegetable specialty vendors

Existing HIP vendors can also apply to enable additional HIP terminals through this opportunity.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

A panel of reviewers including representatives from DTA, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR) and Department of Public Health (DPH) will analyze and score proposals based on a combination of all or some of the below criteria. During the selection process, the panel may request additional information from the applicants. Selected applicants will be those best able to describe how they will effectively meet the following needs.

1. Ability to establish HIP access point(s) in vulnerable communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, as defined by a number of criteria including but not limited to:
 - a. COVID-19 cases per capita
 - b. Decreases in SNAP utilization
 - c. SNAP applications per capita

- d. Unemployment insurance (UI) claims per capita
- 2. Ability to establish HIP access point(s) in regions designated as food deserts or low-income, low-access census tracts by USDA or [environmental justice neighborhoods](#)
- 3. Ability to establish HIP access point(s) in areas where the rate of HIP utilization and/or number of HIP access points is disproportionately low compared to the number of SNAP clients living in the region (see county-level information in “HIP households by client location” [here](#))
- 4. Ability to reach SNAP client populations vulnerable during the COVID-19 crisis, including, but not limited to:
 - a. Seniors
 - b. People with disabilities
 - c. People confined to their residences during COVID-19 due to illness or chronic medical issues
 - d. People of color
 - e. People who speak languages other than English as their primary language
- 5. Feasibility of action plan for serving populations who are especially vulnerable to food insecurity during the COVID-19 crisis. This action plan may include but is not limited to:
 - a. Home delivery models
 - b. Online/phone ordering and curbside pickup models
 - c. Mobile Farmers’ Markets
 - d. CSA shares transacted automatically through the CSA Pilot
 - e. Coordination with local community partners and government agencies who can help identify areas and vulnerable communities
- 6. Demonstrated client demand for HIP access points
- 7. Demonstrated capacity and commitment to serve SNAP clients in culturally appropriate ways, including but not limited to:
 - a. Cultural competence and cultural humility of business owner and staff
 - b. Ability to provide service in languages spoken by community members
 - c. Historical presence and familiarity with community
 - d. Hiring staff from or living in the community
 - e. Cultural relevance of produce for community served

EXPECTED DURATION OF OPPORTUNITY

New and existing vendors who are selected to add HIP access points through this opportunity can expect to provide HIP benefits to eligible DTA clients so long as funding is available.

Funding is dependent on appropriation and may vary as circumstances change.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Selected vendors are responsible to obtain their own [EBT-processing equipment](#) that can process the SNAP benefits and HIP incentives, for the number of access points awarded. Alternatively,

vendors classified by FNS as direct-marketing farms, farmers markets, or nonprofit buying cooperatives may join the [SNAP CSA Pilot](#), which requires no EBT equipment to process SNAP/HIP transactions.

Equipment funding and other funds to support proposals may be available through the [Food Resiliency Fund Grant Program](#).

New vendors must complete a HIP training offered by DTA before processing HIP benefits.

Selected vendors must use their new terminal or CSA program to sell their produce to clients in the communities noted in their proposal. Requests to sell at additional locations not listed in the proposal must be approved by DTA. Vendors must also provide updated sales location information to DTA and/or MDAR on an ongoing basis, upon request by DTA or MDAR, so that information can be shared with clients.

All SNAP/HIP transactions must comply with SNAP regulations.

Funding for the HIP incentive is not guaranteed but is subject to appropriation.

HOW TO APPLY

Vendors interested in applying must submit their proposal via the [COVID-19 HIP Vendor Notice of Opportunity webpage](#) by July 1, 2020. Selected vendors will be notified via email.

Questions regarding the application or selection process may be submitted to DTA.HIP@state.ma.us. Questions will not be answered directly. DTA will respond publicly to all questions by posting on the [COVID-19 HIP Vendor Notice of Opportunity webpage](#).